Extending Welcome with an Online Group

BY CHRIS CASANOVA



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At the start of the Covid pandemic many PW groups wondered how to keep being PW. University Presbyterian Church in Tempe, Arizona, was no different. The dilemma was how to keep PW engaged and connected when the session would not allow groups to meet in person on the church campus. Then we realized that if worship could be offered online, why not a PW group meeting?

Eventually, our congregation resumed in-person worship and groups began meeting on campus again. It became obvious that some women felt uncomfortable or were no longer able to attend an in-person circle meeting.

As a result, the PW Coordinating Team decided to continue to offer *Horizons* Bible study on Zoom while also reopening in-person circles. The Zoom-based group started with about five women. As time passed, other women from the church moved out of the area, yet desired to stay connected. Then one circle closed due to lack of attendance, but group members wanted to continue to engage in Bible study. As a result, the online circle kept growing.

> "Participating in Coast2Coast gave me the option to join a PW Circle when my own Circle disbanded. I felt welcomed and hearing different viewpoints has been great."
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> —Nob Ichishita, Bible study participant

Currently the Coast2Coast group includes 15–20 women from Florida to California and several states in between, gathering monthly for fellowship and Bible study. Some participants have commented that it is nice to have a circle that you do not need to leave your house to attend, meet new women and talk deeply about our faith. One woman said that it offers an opportunity to hear perspectives on the lesson from women in different communities. Another woman said, "The group thrives on eager participants and a variety of shared nation-wide experiences." Offering *Horizons* Bible study online has established a warm and welcoming circle that allows people to stay active in PW and connected beyond the bounds of what an in-person group could offer.

There is no single way to be a PW and being flexible is important. Thinking about declining participation can be frustrating and can result in inaction. However, for PW to thrive, it is necessary to think outside the box about ways to build relationships across boundaries. PW can only move forward by participants staying connected to one another and the PW Purpose. This online Bible study has created an inclusive, caring community of women.

Interested in joining Coast2Coast or learning how to start an online Bible study group? Email chriscasanova.pw@gmail.com

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